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A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Inequalities in Education

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A CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

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It is universally recognised that education is an important instrument for the improvement in the social and economic conditions of the individuals as well as for the achievement of economic development in the country. The assumption is that the education provides skill formation and knowledge in the development of individuals which increases the productive capacity of the individuals. Thus individuals with higher level of education can avail better benefits of leading to better social and economic gains as compared to those with a lower level of education or illiterates. Similarly, a country can achieve a significant level of economic development if the level of literacy is high and people with technical education are more as compared to the countries having less number of such individuals. In other words, the economic development of the country depends considerably on the availability of skilled manpower and technically competent individuals (human resources) engaged in the various economic activities.

Apart from this, the valuation of education can also play a significant role in equalisation of income distribution among the various higher and lower income groups of population. This is particularly through the inducement of educational and skill development among the individuals who have less income resources.

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and scarcity of assets for generating sizeable amount of income. Thus educational development among the poorer segment of population can assist them in obtaining jobs that require greater skills and so carry with them higher incomes thereby improving their socio-economic status and put them at par with those who upto now were in a higher income group.

Viewing such effective value of education in the channel of social mobility and economic betterment further for equalising the income distribution and socio-economic condition of the poor people, almost all the countries in the world, particularly developing countries, are expanding the educational facilities in general and subsidised education for the economically poor sections of population. Beside the attempts at spreading educational facilities in particular to remote and backward areas of the country, the provision of various financial incentives, aids, scholarships, hostel facilities etc. are also being provided for the economically weaker group of population.

With these considerations of planned development strategies of the countries, sizeably a substantial masses, either belonging to lower socio-economic group or the higher socio-economic group of population have been increasingly utilising the educational opportunities. The studies pertaining to the theme of social origins and economic opportunity highlights that the prominent role has been played by the classes of population in promoting or curtaining educational opportunities.¹ Accordingly the increasing participation in the educational opportunity of

the people has been helpful in equalising the income opportunities among the different segments of population to some degree at least. Equality in income distribution among various population groups have been achieved in proportion to the development of educational facilities provided by the country.² For instance, the developed countries have been investing a relatively higher amount of resources for educational development and its expansion as compared to developing countries. In the resultant, the income inequalities in developed countries has been removed to a much greater extent as compared to developing countries.³

In the planned development strategies of India also, there has been due emphasis on the need for universalization of elementary education as its basic social objective. To meet such attempts, the policies have been designed to introduce extensive educational development in various remote and backward areas in the country and on providing various financial incentives and facilities for the population in general and special educational subsidies and scholarships for the deprived group of population such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in particular. Beside this, the reservation of seats and relaxation in minimum marks required for admission in various educational levels and courses have also been introduced so that the deprived section of population can receive higher education leading to better employment and economic opportunity. Apart from this, the provision of the reservation of sizeable numbers of vacancies and the relaxation in the minimum educational qualifications and age limits has also been introduced in the different economic sectors.

Unfortunately, the participation of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population at various levels of education has been unsatisfactory. The concentration of this group of population has been noticed particularly at the elementary school levels while their representation at the higher levels of education and technical courses has been much less as compared to the general population. On the other hand, out of the population belonging to deprived group who do receive higher education, only a negligible proportion from them are able to get better kind of employment opportunities with significant levels of earnings.

Let us examine the existing inequalities in educational opportunities individually among the various racial groups of population including among sex, between the developed and developing countries as well as in India at rural, urban and regional levels.

Developed and Developing Countries

The expansion and development of educational institutions in developed countries has been at a substantially higher level as compared to developing countries. With the greater opportunity of education for different groups of population living in various urban and rural areas as well as in backward and developed locations, in developed countries, the level of literacy has been universalised. Sometimes it becomes difficult to clarify the relationship between the equality in educational development and the opportunity of education in these countries because both rewards and opportunities are

more equally distributed.⁴ On the other hand, in developing countries extensive development of educational institutions has been noticed to be of a much lower level as compared to the developed countries. It is of course true that the developing countries have far less resources to be able to spread educational facilities in general and for the educational development of economically poor class of population in particular whereas the developed countries has no such constraints. At the same time the development of social forces fighting for greater educational development has also been much more in developed countries as compared to developing countries.⁵

Considering the educational development among male and female population, it is noticed that in developing countries only very low percentage of females are enrolled at various levels of education while in the developing countries the proportion of female enrolments is found similar to their male counterparts. The school enrolments of females at the elementary levels of education are found reasonable while at the higher levels of educations the strength of females enrolled is negligible in the developing countries. In the developed countries on the other hand, the females enrolment at elementary education is sometimes higher than male enrolment and at higher levels of education they are more or less similar.⁶ By and large the enrolments at various levels of education in developing countries are half in proportion to that of the male enrolments of developed countries. Incorporating the data relating to the periods 1960 and 1975, the study of Field⁷

reveals that the developing countries as a group the probability of male in the school age group (6-23 years) being enrolled is 40 per cent higher than that of females. Wider differences also exist in same regions. For instance in the Arab States this figure accounts 70 per cent. Further he claims the probability of a male being enrolled is higher than that of female by 30 per cent for the first age group (6-11 years), 48 per cent for the second age group (12-17 years) and 84 per cent for the last (17-23 years) age group. Thus we find in developing countries education atleast beyond the primary level has the immediate effect of lowering participation rates of both male and female in the school going age ranges. Beyond the school age, the norms appears to be a slightly positive relation between educational level and male participation rates.

Educational inequalities within the countries are examined with respect to the inequalities in the quantitatively expansion of educational institutions and their distribution on the one hand and due to inequalities in the quantitative nature of the educational institutions. In the developed countries inequality in education to be measured in relation to the inequality in the quality of the education while quantitatively the educational expansion has been made quite adequately at various locations of the countries. The educational institutions in developed countries are established with the efforts of various public and private organisations those have their own criteria of the selection of teachers, fixation of the remuneration paid to teaching staff and providing educational and other facilities to the teachers and students. The private

educational institutions are known to be qualitatively better-off and produce better quality of students as compared to the institutions established by public organisations.⁸ In the developing countries, the inequalities in education are existing due to the inequalities in the quality of educations as well as due to the variations in the expansion of educational institutions also. The educational institutions in these countries are not only limited but these limited institutions are not distributed equally at various locations of the countries. Quantitatively on the other hand, in these countries the institutions running under the management of various organisations are also producing various inferior and superior quality of students. In general the educational quality of students is far below the desired level in developing countries. For instance, of the enrolled children at primary level of education, only half of them can reach the fourth grade of education and repeaters accounts about 15 to 20 per cent.⁹

Study in India

Even since Independence the government has been laying greater and greater emphasis on the spread of education and to improve educational facilities. As a result of these efforts some progress has certainly been made as can be seen in the increasing percentage of literates from one plan period to the other. However, when we analyse the levels of education between males and females, rural and urban population and between scheduled caste/scheduled tribe and the general population, we find that inequalities continue to exist even today.

Between Regions

Inequalities in education between one region and another are still existing because of variation in the pattern of resource mobilisation for educational development. Those regions which are providing a higher amount on education have achieved higher levels of educational equalities among the various weaker and rich population groups as compared to those regions which are providing less amount for education. For instance Maharashtra is among the economically developed states and Bihar ranks amongst the poorest states of India. The state of Maharashtra is diverting a significant amount of state income towards educational development and mobilising resources to provide educational incentives for the economically poor group of population. On the other hand Bihar is one of the backward states in providing resources as incentives and facilities for educational development in general and in particular for economically poor population groups such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. As a result while Maharashtra has achieved a high enrolment rate among the scheduled caste children at various educational levels, Bihar is among those states which have the lowest enrolment rate at all educational levels.¹⁰ Thus we find regional variation in socio-economic development positively related to the equality of educational attainment among the population vis-a-vis the population of other caste.¹¹

Rural and Urban Areas

Educational institutions existing in India are functioning under the administration of various organisations and manage-

ments such as private, public, government aided, trusteeship and cooperatives and each have their own rules and regulations related to the appointments of teachers, their qualifications and fixation of remuneration as well as the facilities provided to the students and teachers in the school. Those educational institutions which are under the control of private organisations are located mainly in urban areas are charging higher tuition fees, paying better of remuneration to teachers, recruiting better quality of teachers and are, therefore, generally producing better quality of students although in limited numbers, as compared to the remaining educational institutions. The public and government aided educational institutions are mainly concentrated in the rural areas and are generally inferior as compared to the private institutions. The quality of education is thus poor and the turnout of students from these institutions is also of a poorer quality. The urban population have the choice of a variety of institutions and can choose the institution according to their capacity to bear the educational costs whereas the rural population are mainly dependent on limited numbers of public and government aided educational institutions and in case they desire better education they have to move to the urban areas. The existing educational institutions in rural areas are, unfortunately, not even distributed equitably so that the children of different locations do not have equal educational opportunity. Thus, there are clear cut differences in rural-urban educational facilities and these differences are found even in the rural areas themselves on account of the uneven distribution of schools in the

country; there are also different degrees of progress made by different states in the organisational pattern of educational facilities at the school level. 12

Besides this, the urban educational institutions established by government are provided with better study facilities as compared to the rural educational institutions, particularly at the elementary educational levels. For instance the study of Ashraf and Papola¹³ reveal that the facilities given to various schools are inadequate in rural areas. Junior and Basic schools both located in urban areas are better served and equipped than those in rural areas. Because of the non-availability of better schools in rural areas the children are forced to attend ill equipped schools in the villages while the students of urban areas have the opportunity of attending good schools. 14

The population living in rural areas have the opportunity of only primary and secondary level of educations while for college education they have to depend on urban areas. College level education from urban areas is possible for only a small segment of the population, because a high percentage of the rural population is poor and so their economic condition does not allow them to send children to urban areas for higher education. Thus, a very high percentage of drop outs is noticed among rural children after the elementary level of education. The rural population which have the resources for acquiring college education are from the landowning and relatively better off group of society whereas the children of landless, poor and sharecroppers are at a maximum disadvantage. 15

Thus we find the educational development in urban areas has taken place at a much faster pace as compared to rural areas. This fact is adequately reflected by the differences in levels of literacy between the rural and urban areas. Since the implementation of planning, the enrolments at various levels of education in urban areas have been increasing at a faster rate as compared to rural areas. Moreover, during the period 1950-51 and 1978-79¹⁶ the highest growth of enrolment has been noticed at the higher levels of education which is mainly available in the urban areas and so the urban population is benefited more than the rural population. On the other hand, the lowest growth of enrolments are found at the primary level of education which has a greater coverage and so both the rural and urban population receives its benefits. The majority of students enroled at primary level of education are from a rural background and are economically and socially so poor that a significant number from among them drop-out after the completion of their primary education.¹⁷

Scheduled Caste/Tribe and General Caste Population

In spite of providing various kind of special educational incentives and facilities for the spread of education among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population, the progress that they have achieved so far seems to be relatively poor as compared to the general population. The striking feature is that while overall enrolment rates of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population has increased at faster rate than that of the population of the other castes in 1971 over the

year 1961,¹⁸ but this is primarily because of the significant increase in enrolment rates at primary level of education, importance of which is lowered down as the drop-outs among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students was reported to be much higher as compared to those of non-scheduled caste and tribes at the primary level of education.¹⁹ Accordingly, the wastage and stagnation among the children of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes at primary and middle level of education are found to be three times greater than that of the higher castes of population.²⁰ Nearly half of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children getting enroled in class first, drop-out by class five and only one-fourth of them reach in class seven, thus the school leavers after the final examination of class eleven or twelve represents about 15 per cent only.²¹ Further due to the high drop-out rate at the primary and secondary level of education, the strength of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe children have been noticed to be very poor at higher levels of education. A study conducted in 57 colleges of Maharashtra²² reveals that the strength of Scheduled Caste children was about 6 per cent in 50 colleges while there was no enrolment from this caste in seven colleges. The enrolments of Scheduled Caste was also found negligible in professional and technical education, like medical and engineering colleges. Even this negligible representation in the professional and technical education is generally found in colleges of inferior quality. The other study²³ carried out in the same State has also observed that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes enrolments at different levels of education are consistently

below their percentages to total population while at the professional and college level the condition is even worse.

In Gujarat²⁴ the high castes such as Patidar, Brahmin, Bania students constitutes 88 per cent participation in college education while the representation of lower castes is only 7 per cent. In Karnataka²⁵ the representation of children belonging to lower non-brahmin and deprived castes was found to be much less than the dominant caste such as Brahmins in the college educational levels. In Delhi²⁶ the representation of students belonging to upper caste is about 78 per cent while only 2.7 per cent students belong to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population at the college level of education. In Uttar Pradesh²⁷ the general progress in higher education has improved significantly during 1983 over the period 1973, although the scheduled castes are still lagging behind the other castes.

Thus it appears that the majority of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population has only improved their social conditions after receiving the elementary level of education rather than finding better employment opportunity and occupying suitable economic status, because majority of them could not avail the job oriented higher education and other technical and professional education. In other words, we can say that Government has succeeded in bringing about an improvement in social status of these castes, but it has not been possible to improve their economic status through equitable distribution of job opportunities and incomes.

Male and Female Population

Traditionally the women in India are given much less opportunity as compared to men in their socio-economic and political development. Such conservative attitudes towards the development of women in our society continues to exist even today and can be seen even in the progressively developing areas of the country. A study conducted by NCERT reveals that the girls should not be given any education at all was categorically registered by 77.8 per cent of the parents, 64.5 per cent parents felt the girls should not be admitted to higher education even if they were very intelligent.²⁸ The challenge of traditional social factors has been so great that the women in economic sector are considered less productive as compared to men. Therefore, in almost all the economic sectors, the employers prefer to recruit men even though they may be less qualified than the prospective women candidates. Because of these negative factors in operation women have been lagging behind men and their socio-economic development has taken place at a much slower place as compared to men.

However, with the constitution providing for equal opportunity of education and the efforts of planned development strategies implemented in the country, considerable progress has been achieved in equalising the educational development among the male and female population. During past decades the enrolment rates of women has increased at a significant rate. Sometimes the female enrolment rates has even increased at a faster rate than the male population.²⁹ If we consider the

period 1951 and 1974, the women education at second level increased seven times while that of males only three times. However, on the whole, boys enrolments far exceeds that of girls. Thus girls are found enroled at different levels of education in proportion to boys while in some sphares of education such as nursing, we find a near total concentration of girls only.³⁰ It has also been noticed that the performance of girls in education is comparatively better than the boys as is evident from the pass percentage of girls as compared to that of the boys. This is so since girls are generally found to be more serious and dedicated to studies and attending classes. At the same time the aggregate wastage and stagnation rate in education among boys is 84.70 per cent while among girls it is about 75 per cent.³¹

Even though, there has been significant educational development among female population, the educational progress which they have achieved at various levels of education is much less as compared to the boys. The drop-out rate among girls is very high. Wastage and stagnation has been noticed playing an important role in the depletion of female students than the male students, especially between the grade first and second. The extent of higher drop-outs of female population has been noticed higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas.³² It is particularly due to, firstly, rural population is hardly aware of the value of education and they prefer to engage the female mainly on their household's cores, secondly, the rural population cannot afford the educational costs of their children, particularly their daughters, due to their poor eco-

nomic condition. Thirdly, the system of early marriage puts an abrupt end to their education. Therefore, the majority of girls enroled at various levels of education generally belong to urban high caste, white collar families while people from the rural areas, low caste and from low economic levels definitely tend to deny opportunity of education to their daughters at subsequent levels.³³ In the urban areas the chances of a female receiving education is more or less equal to the male particularly when both the educational and income levels of parents is above the medium.³⁴ The female education is also found positively related with the level of education of the mother. Such educational relationship of mother and their daughter emerges as a strong variable in the educational development of females in rural areas also.³⁵

Beside the conservative attitudes towards education of women which proves to be a serious bottleneck in the opportunity of education of girls, there are certain other factors also which play an important negative role by which the enrolment of girls is lagging behind boys particularly to rural areas. Some of these factors are lack of sufficient women teachers, irrelevant curriculæ and lack of adjustment between school timings to the seasonal requirements.³⁶

Concluding Observations

The strategies aimed towards equalisation of educational opportunities among males and females as well as among different racial groups of population has been successful in the

developed countries whereas the developing countries are far behind in achieving the desired level of equalisation. However, the population in general and belonging to different socio-economic classes have been participating at various educational levels at a higher rate today as compared to a few decades ago, but the gap between the higher and lower socio-economic group of population have continued to persist even after over three decades of planning. The educational development among females has significantly increased in developed as well as developing countries but the females in developed countries have been successful in overtaking their male counterparts, particularly at the primary level of education but in developing countries females are consistently lagging behind boys at each level of education.

In the case of India, equality in educational opportunity has improved significantly among the population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other general castes based on sex. However, the participation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is mainly confined to the primary educational levels while only a small percentage of them are reaching the secondary educational level and at the higher level of educations and other technical and professional level of courses their percentage is negligible. It is therefore seen that the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes population have been able to improve their social structure by attaining some education but have not been able to take maximum advantage of better employment and earning opportunities. Since their education is mainly confined to the primary level only.

The educational development among female population on the other hand has remained quite low for generations. Their representation at various levels of education has been found unsatisfactory. The variations in the opportunity of educational levels among male and female population is particularly marked in the rural areas where the females are made to work on the household cores and the semiliterate and illiterate parents give lesser opportunity of education to their daughters as compared to their sons. The socio-economic backwardness of the families either living in rural or urban areas has been one of the main reasons why the girls fail to avail educational opportunities upto the desired levels.

The development of educational facilities as well as opportunities of education among different social groups as well as among both the sexes has taken place to a much more significant extent in urban areas whereas in rural areas their is mainly the concentration of elementary educational facilities. Those persons from rural areas who do receive higher education are almost totally dependent on the urban areas for their education.

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